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DGCA EXTENDS SUSPENSION OF INT'L PASSENGER FLIGHTS

The scheduled flights have been suspended till November 30 amidst pandemic fears, the DGCA said on Wednesday

FLIGHTS PERMITTED ON SELECT ROUTES

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), however, confirmed that scheduled international flights may be allowed on select routes by the competent authority on a case-to-case basis. The aviation regulator circular also mentioned that the suspension does not affect international all-cargo operations, and also flights specifically approved by it

INT'L FLIGHTS GROUNDED SINCE MARCH

- Scheduled international passenger services have been suspended in India since March 23 due to Covid-19
- But, special flights are operating under the Vande Bharat Mission since May under bileteral air bubble arrangements
- Scheduled domestic passenger flights resumed on May 25

18

NUMBER OF COUNTRIES WITH WHICH INDIA HAS AIR BUBBLE PACTS

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARWAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

ONION PRICES TO STAY NORTH

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Mumbai/Bengaluru

THERE is little buzz in Nashik's Lasalgaon, though it is Asia's largest onion market. For, the mandi is shut as traders are protesting against Income Tax raids on 14 of them as also the 'mindless' stock limit imposed by the Central government.

Activity at Lasalgaon matters as a whopping 35% of India's onion supply chain is sourced from that mandi. Sulking traders are adding to the stress the kitchen staple is already facing because of heavy rain damaging the standing crop, pushing the average retail price across the country to around ₹90 per kg (see box). Retail prices in Telangana are particularly swollen (Hyderabad ₹130-150; Warangal ₹100-120; Karimnagar ₹100) as supplies from Maharashtra are just a trickle.

Caught between the government and the trading community is the *aam aadmi*, who is being forced to reduce his onion intake. "Many people have stopped buying the king of the kitchen for now," revealed vegetable trader Pritam Das in Jaipur.

Till about a few days ago, when Lasalgaon was a beehive of activity, onion arrivals were in the range of 70,000 to 75,000 tonnes per day as against the normal of 1.25 lakh to 1.50 lakh tonnes. In other words, a drop of 40-50%, informed Nanasaheb Patil, an onion growing farmer leader in Nasik.

"Lasalgaon gets ample supplies in August from states like Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana after harvest. But this year, the standing crop in all the three states was damaged by the rain. In the first week of October, onions normally start arriving into the mandi from Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. But floods in parts of Maharashtra damaged both the old stock and fresh crops. As a result, new arrivals have been delayed by 40-60 days," Patil shared.

In Karnataka, extended monsoon in Chitradurga, Ballari, Gadag, Dharwad, Haveri and Chikkamagaluru districts contributed to the super spike in prices. "Although normally there is spike in onion prices in November-December because the March stocks tend to get exhausted and the October harvest cannot be dried and stored for long, this year's rise is because around 70,000 hectares in Karnataka got affected by the monsoon," said B N Prasad, managing director of Horticultural Producers' Cooperative Marketing and Processing Society).

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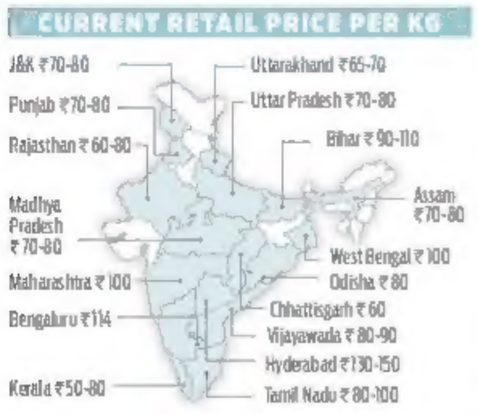
CURRENT RETAIL PRICE PER KG



NO VACCINE SWING IN BIHAR?

BJP's promise to provide Covid shots for free doesn't appear to cut ice with the voters

BIHAR 2020 DECIDE

VOTER TURNOUT

53.54%

Women voters 50%

1% DROP

In the 2015 Assembly elections, the voting percentage was 54.75% around one percentage point higher

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR, SANA SHAKIL & MUKESH RANJAN
@ Patna/New Delhi/Muzaffarpur

WAITING to meet the doctor at a nursing home in Muzaffarpur, Rupesh Kumar Sinha, 44, a medical representative with a pharmaceutical company, said the Covid-19 pandemic and the threat it poses was not even a talking point among the people, leave alone an election issue.

"I am in the field of health and I have seen patients suffering from coronavirus. People are a bit scared but not overly worried," he said, dismissing the suggestion that the Bharatiya Janata Party's promise to provide the Covid vaccine free to Bihar was a game changer.

From Muzaffarpur and Saran to Samastipur and Patna, the BJP's populist promise grabbed media headlines and was a hot topic of debate in drawing rooms last week, but for the voters in the dust bowls of Bihar, Covid and the vaccine are hardly issues to be animated about.

EAR TO THE GROUND

"When the government could not make proper arrangements for Covid-19 patients, it is foolish to believe such false promises," said Saroj Kumar Thakur, 35, who runs a salon in Patna.

Why the voters are not deeply impressed by the free vaccine promise lies perhaps in the Covid numbers. Despite being the third-most populated state with a creaking public health infrastructure, Bihar has done well on the virus front, making it a non-issue and hardly a mass concern.

While the national case fatality rate is 1.5%, Bihar's is a mere 0.499%, one of the lowest in the country. The disease's incidence per million in India is 5,790.1 but in Bihar it is 1,572.5, the lowest in the country.

On total deaths and active cases also, the state has not done badly. The highest death count is in Maharashtra at 38,717, followed by Andhra Pradesh, 9,917, and Karnataka, 9,461. Bihar's is only 925, one of the lowest among the populous states.

Voters patiently await their turn to cast votes for the first phase of Bihar Assembly elections at Bhabhua police station in Kaimur district on Wednesday | PTI|P10

As for active cases, the worst five states are Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra and Tamil Nadu. With 11,420 active cases, Bihar's numbers are one of the lowest among heavily populated states.

The state is at the 11th position in terms of total cases, seventeenth position in active cases and eleventh in recoveries.

But perhaps more important than the Covid figures is the socio-economic profile of the people affected by the deadly disease, which has the potential to make the BJP's promise a dud.

CONTINUED ON: P9

COVID STATS

Despite its poor health infra, Bihar has done well in fighting Covid

TOTAL CASES 1,90,740

ACTIVE CASES 11,420

CASE FATALITY RATE 0.499%

Cases per mn 1,572.5

CASE RECOVERY RATE 95.24%

Seventeenth position in active cases

Eleventh position in total cases

Voters line up near a polling booth in RR Nagar, part of the Bangalore Teachers constituency on Wednesday | VINOD KUMAR T

Amid Covid, 4 Council seats see high voting

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

IN the first election amid the Covid-19 pandemic, Karnataka saw better polling for four seats of the Legislative Council, compared to the previous polls for the same seats in 2014. On the day voters in Bihar polled in phase-1 of assembly elections, Karnataka witnessed voting for the South-East Graduates, West Graduates, Northeast Teachers and Bangalore Teachers constituencies of the Legislative Council.

By end of polling at 5 pm on Wednesday, West Graduates seat had seen 70.11 per cent polling while 74.84% polling was reported in Southeast Graduates seat. The Northeast Teachers constituency had recorded 73.32% voting and Bangalore Teachers constituency witnessed 66.2% polling. The voter turnout for these seats were 49.48%, 52.58%, 60.30% and 44.91%, respectively in 2014.

Given the pandemic situation, all polling stations were equipped with sanitisers and social distancing markers. Masks were mandatory for polling officers as well as voters. All polling material, including ballot papers and booths, were sanitised before voting commenced. Two Covid-19 patients were seen voting at a polling booth in Annigeri of Dharwad district for the West Graduates seat wearing PPE kits. The administration had made arrangements for the patients to vote after 5 pm with adequate safety measures. In addition to patients, the poll staff also were seen wearing PPE kits.

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NIA raids Bengaluru researcher, NGOs in J&K terror funding case, seizes papers

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru, Srinagar, New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday searched the house of an independent researcher, Swathi Seshadri, in Bengaluru, besides conducting searches on the premises of some journalists and NGOs at 10 locations in Jammu and Kashmir in a "major crackdown on terror funding."

According to the NIA, Swathi is an associate of Khurram Parvez, the co-ordinator of J&K Coalition of Civil Society, whose house was also searched by the counter-terrorism agency on Wednesday. Simultaneous raids were carried out at the office of NGO Athrout, Parvez's associate Parvez Ahmad Matta, journalist Parvez Bukhari, and Parveena Ahangar, chairperson of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP). The residence of Hurriyat activist Mohammad Yousuf Sofi alias Salman in Brar area of north Kashmir's Bandipora district, was also raided.

NIA officials come out of the Greater Kashmir office in Srinagar on Wednesday

The NIA sleuths, accompanied by CRPF personnel, raided the office of Greater Kashmir at Press Enclave, Srinagar, on Wednesday morning. "They searched documents and other material available in the newspaper office," sources said.

"The case was registered by the NIA on October 8 under Sections 120B, 124 A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for criminal conspiracy and sedition and Sections 17, 18, 22A, 22C, 38, 39 and 40 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act UA(P)A, 1967, on receipt of credible information that certain NGOs and trusts are collecting funds domestically and abroad through so-called donations and business contributions and are then utilising these funds for secessionist and terrorist activities in J&K," the NIA has stated. The agency claimed to have recovered several incriminating documents and electronic devices during the searches.

CONTINUED ON: P10

Karnataka firm on reopening degree colleges, PG institutes from Nov 17

PEARL MARIA D'SOUZA
@ Bengaluru

THE Higher Education Department has decided to go ahead with the November 17 schedule for reopening of degree colleges and post-graduate institutions in the state.

On October 27, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had said that its Unlock 5.0 guidelines, issued on September 30, will remain in effect till November 30. However, since state governments and Union Territories were given the discretion of opening educational institutions, based on the assessment of the Covid-19 situation and subject to SOPs, Karnataka has decided to go ahead with reopening of colleges, a top official from the department told *The New Indian Express*.

Colleges across the state are already making preparations for the arrival of students on campuses. However, managing hostels remains a tricky issue. The Higher Education Department on Wednesday discussed with stakeholders on how to accommodate students.

As of now, the state has allowed two options for conducting classes — online and offline. Based on how many students register for hostels, the department will decide on the steps that need to be taken, said the official. All precautionary measures will be taken when opening hostels and bus services for students, he added.

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GEOTAGGING

JPC asks Twitter to apologise for Leh map goof-up

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

TWITTER's geotagging feature displaying Jammu and Kashmir as part of China is a criminal offence and an act of treason, the joint parliamentary committee looking into the Data Protection Bill told representatives of the social media giant on Wednesday.

The JPC, chaired by BJP MP Meenakshi Lekhi, asked the firm to get an explanation from its US-based parent company in the form of an affidavit along with a written apology.

Sources said the Twitter executives apologised for the "technical issue" but the JPC was not satisfied. The panel also sought to know on what basis Twitter takes down content and blocks accounts.

Amazon executives also deposed before the JPC on Wednesday and were questioned about the firm's revenue model and how much tax it pays in India. A few days ago, Amazon had refused to appear before the panel.

Tigress found dead after territorial fight in Bhadra reserve

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

A tigress, aged about five, was found dead in Teguru Gudda limits under Hebbe range in the Bhadra Tiger Reserve on Tuesday.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) Ajai Misra told *TNIE* that the carcass was found by forest officials during their regular beat. All its claws and canines were intact and it has been found that the animal died during an infight. The visceral samples have been sent for a detailed analysis.

Tigers are known to protect their territories and fight with other tigers from outside.

The tigress may have died three days ago, said Bhadra Tiger project director Takat Singh Ranavath.

Since the area is a dense forest, it takes a beat forester 2-3 days to completely perambulate the area. Misra said he found the carcass during his drive. No foul play has been suspected so far. The postmortem was conducted on Wednesday and the carcass burnt as per procedure laid down by the National Tiger Conservation Authority.

Another senior forest official added that poaching cases are in control in this region. However, there are stray cases of jaw traps being found, which have been kept to catch wild boars wandering on the fringes of the forest patches.

"The carcass was found on Tuesday morning, but by the time the veterinarian from Shivamogga arrived at the location, it was 6pm. The postmortem was done as per procedures and teeth marks were seen on the carcass. These marks are normally found when a male tries to dominate over a female for mating and expanding territory," the senior forest officer said.

This is the second tigress death reported in the last two years. In 2019, a female tiger was found dead 5 km away from the spot where the tigress was found dead on Tuesday.

Then also, it was found that the death was due to infight. The official explained that more cases are coming to light as sightings of the carnivore have also improved in the forest patch.

EXPRESS READ

Rajyotsava awards to be presented on Nov 7

Bengaluru: The State Government on Wednesday announced names of eminent personalities for the Karnataka Rajyotsava awards. Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa will give away the awards at a formal event at Ravindra Kalakshetra here on November 7, Kannada and Culture Minister CT Ravi said. The award carries a cash component of Rs 1 lakh, a gold medal weighing 20 grams and a citation | P2